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Mayor Kelly Appoints Joda Thongnopnua as Chief of Staff, Chris Sands as Director of Community Engagement

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn.— Chattanooga Mayor Tim Kelly today announced the appointment of Joda Thongnopnua as Chief of Staff for the Mayor's Office, effective this week. Thongnopnua served as a core advisor during Mayor Kelly's campaign for elected office and has been serving as the City's Chief Policy Officer since the current mayoral term began in April 2021.

Kelly also announced the appointment of Chris Sands, educator and prominent leader in Chattanooga's local faith community, as the City's Director of Community Engagement. Sands will start with the City on Dec. 17.

About Joda Thongnopnua

As Chief Policy Officer for the City of Chattanooga since April of this year, Thongnopnua played an instrumental role in helping the Mayor to develop his *One Chattanooga* strategic plan including the adoption of an ambitious new budget for Fiscal Year 2021-2022, launching the hiring process for multiple new city administrators and the Chief of Police, and overseeing the process for dispensation of American Rescue Plan dollars throughout the community.



Previously, Thongnopnua served as the Director of Strategic Initiatives and Communications for the Community Foundation of Greater Chattanooga, which manages over \$180 million in charitable assets. He also served as Executive Director for the Metro Ideas Project, a nonprofit policy research startup dedicated to bringing smart solutions to challenges faced by local governments. Additionally, Thongnopnua's experience includes communications work at Lamp Post Group, a Chattanooga-based venture capital firm working to build the infrastructure necessary to support a tech hub in the Southeast U.S.

"With our new budget in place, coupled with American Rescue Plan funds, we'll be able to make unprecedented investments in improving our city," said Mayor Tim Kelly. "No one is more familiar

with our *One Chattanooga* vision and framework than Joda, and his diverse background and experience serving our community has prepared him to lead the Mayor's Office to help make Chattanooga the best city in America."

The City will immediately begin a search to fill Thongnopnua's prior role with a Senior Policy Advisor for the City of Chattanooga to ensure the extensive and ambitious *One Chattanooga* policy agenda maintains its momentum and priority within the Kelly administration.

About Chris Sands

Chris Sands is a longtime pillar of Chattanooga's faith community, serving as Youth Pastor and first



assistant to Bishop Kevin Adams at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church. With a background in leadership studies, Sands has worked for over a decade in program design, team building, and community coalition building throughout the nonprofit, faith, and private sectors. An author of two books, Sands has a proven track record in project management and coordination of team initiatives in business development, recruitment and expansion.

As Director of Community Engagement, Sands will work closely with the Chief Equity Officer to ensure City of Chattanooga initiatives are reaching and engaging residents of every ethnicity, background, and zip code.

"I am delighted to welcome Chris to our team at City Hall," Kelly said. "With his heart for helping people and his persistent and reassuring presence throughout our

community, I'm confident Chris will help ensure that we're *engaging*—not just informing—every citizen in every one of our great neighborhoods."

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